GENDERED DISCOURSE ON THE TRAIL TO THE WHITE HOUSE: A

QUANTITATIVE ANALYSIS OF MEDIA COVERAGE DURING

HILLARY CLINTON'S 2015/16 CAMPAIGN

TO BECOME DEMOCRATIC NOMINEE

by

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A THESIS

Presented to the School of Journalism and Communication
and the Graduate School of the University of Oregon
in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree of
Master of Science

June 2016

THESIS APPROVAL PAGE

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Title: Gendered Discourse on the Trail to the Whitehouse: A Quantitative Analysis of Media Coverage During Hillary Clinton's 2015/16 Campaign to Become Democratic Presidential Nominee

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Degree awarded June 2016

THESIS ABSTRACT

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June 2016

Title: Gendered Discourse on the Trail to the Whitehouse: A Quantitative Analysis of Media Coverage During Hillary Clinton's 2015/16 Campaign to Become Democratic Presidential Nominee

This textual analysis examines online mainstream media coverage during Hillary Clinton's 2015/16 presidential campaign. Previous research on female political candidates indicates that there are both subtle and unsubtle ways the media reinforces masculinity in the political realm.

The results of the study provide a commentary on the internet as a cultural text and Feminist Communication Studies, suggesting that there may be a decrease in the institutionalized sexism in the reporting of mainstream online media. Although encompassing only a small snapshot of the 2015/16 presidential race, the results also suggest that media seemed to lack a category for Clinton – she is both an inside and outsider, sitting at the cusp of a transformative historical event.

Key words: Hillary Clinton, female political candidates, textual analysis, mainstream news media, presidential elections, gendered media coverage, gendered language, gender roles, muted group theory, feminist communication studies, *Fox News, The Wall Street Journal, The Economist, MSNBC*

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ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

This thesis is dedicated to the fearless women who've broken the "rules" and redefined what it means to be a triumphant politician and powerful leader. You've set the stage for all of us…may society commemorate what you've taught us, and may we embody your strength as we continue in your footsteps.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

LIST OF FIGURES

LIST OF TABLES

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Hillary Clinton has come closer to the presidency than any other woman in U.S.

history. And yet, at every step of the way she has faced a barrage of hurdles intricately

intertwined with her political resume and tenure as First Lady. On January 20, 2007,

when Hillary announced her decision to run for president for the first time, she stated,

"I'm in, and I'm in to win" (*NBC News*, 2007). She proceeded to run a tight race against

Senator Barack Obama, who eventually took the lead during the primaries and won the

Democratic nomination as well as the general election. In 2015, Clinton announced she

would once again vie for the White House. Her second race not only deals with the

shifting narrative of American politics, but also occurs amidst the controversy

surrounding her time as Secretary of State. "There truly is no other potential female

contender for the White House with the experience of Hillary Clinton, set against the

backdrop of public distrust not just of female ambition, but distrust of 'The Clintons' in

particular" (Lawrence & Rose, 2010, p. 104).

In general, news coverage of candidates tends to be negative in nature.

Presidential hopefuls face a very competitive "horse race," delicately positioned between

voter preferences and smear campaigns. Thus, one is left to wonder if mainstream media

coverage of Clinton is influenced by the public's distrust and hesitancy at electing not

only a female candidate, but also a political figure so tightly intertwined with a past spent

in the spotlight. And, does mainstream media continue to produce coverage reminiscent

of an era when men dominated the political arena? Ultimately, in coverage of Hillary

Clinton's bid for office, does the nation's current mainstream media system perpetuate

institutionalized sexism and gender stereotypes in U.S. politics (Lawrence & Rose, 2010; Parry-Giles, 2014)?

In an effort to answer these questions, this study examines the online discourse surrounding Clinton's 2015 campaign to become the Democratic presidential nominee. The work is quantitative in nature and is explored through the lens of the Muted Group Theory and preconceived notions of gender in the political realm, to understand the power play within the mainstream media in its online form as well as the language used by the two political majorities to position a female candidate. The textual analysis completed in this study will lay the brickwork for interpreting the power play between the sexes in mainstream political media and it will further an understanding of the language used in discourse surrounding a female public political figure.

As we debate whether the digital world is really an extension of the "real world," and many individuals (in this case women) experience sexism in online dialogue, it is the ideal time to examine the status quo and the portrayal of a female political figure in mainstream media distributed online. As our everyday lives become increasingly digital in nature, the findings of this study will have immense practical application in the power tug-of-war between the sexes and accountability in online discourse and within the political arena. It will also participate in, and pose an opportunity for social transformation, as it will coincide with the events surrounding potentially the first female presidential nominee chosen to represent a political party in United States history.

CHAPTER II

LITERATURE REVIEW

Before we dive into an investigation of the ways in which female candidates are portrayed in online discourse during the 2016 presidential campaign, we must first turn to a theoretical foundation to gain perspective on the history of gendered discourse. This background consists of an integration of the Muted Group Theory through the lens of Feminist Communication Studies. It also incorporates previous work researchers have conducted analyzing Clinton's 2008 presidential campaign. With this foundation in mind, it will then be necessary to interpret preconceived notions of gender in the political realm and how the internet serves as a cultural text for these schema.

The Muted Group Theory Through the Lens of Feminist Communication Studies

The Muted Group theory, originally proposed in the 1970s by anthropologists Edwin and Shirley Ardener, explains that women are often underrepresented in communication coming from the status quo, even though they form about half of the population. In their research, the Ardeners discovered that when anthropologists were talking to men, the "statements made by the male segment were *about* both males and females" (Ardener, 1975). Because of men's historical political dominance, and their greater mobility within societies, they are often given the voice when speaking to an ethnographer or speaking with someone from outside the society. This commonly results in ethnographers "feeding" their own world perspectives to their subjects, and the subject then feeding the ideas backs to the ethnographer. Although some ethnographers believe they may have 'cracked the code' of society, it may have been done so without any direct reference to women from within the specified group (Ardener, 1975).

In 1981, Kramarae was one of the scholars to incorporate the Muted Group Theory to the field of Communication studies, providing further application for Feminist studies scholars. She explains that because the social interactions and communications of men built the current language structure, women are at a disadvantage (Kramarae, 1981). Because not all speakers contribute in equal fashion, the language within a particular society does not treat all of its speakers equally.

Kramarae maintains three assumptions in her description of the Muted Group Theory and how it pertains to women and men from a feminist perspective: (1) because of men and women's varying experiences rooted in the division of labor, women perceive the world differently than men; (2) the dominant system of perception is taken from that of men, which then impedes women's free expression of an alternative view of the world; and (3) in order to participate in society women must transform their own models in terms of the received male system of expression (Kramarae, 1981).

The Internet as a Cultural Text

Finally, when analyzing online communication surrounding a political campaign, we also must understand how the internet serves us as a cultural text. Gersch (1998) uses feminist cultural studies to explain that "the interrelation between science/technology, political economy, and culture accounts for different experiences of women and men in relation to the Internet because of particular discourses privileged in these areas." Thus, the Internet provides "a discursive space for continuous reevaluation and repositioning of traditional gender identities" (Gersch, 1998). The context that the Internet creates allows for an analysis between experiences of empowerment and alienation – two of the main players when it comes to the struggle for power.

This power is not only in the hands of those who have access to the Internet, but also in those who hold political economy over others participating within a conversation (Gersch, 1998), such as media publications and political institutions. Those in positions of power in online groups will form the status quo that ultimately affects the communication and message that then stem from that group.

Closely related is the consideration of the standpoint of journalists, or the media itself. When it comes to newsrooms, it has been argued that gendered standpoints are more likely to influence news coverage at an organizational level (Correa & Harp, 2011). "When women journalists achieve a critical mass, reach positions of influence, or work in small organizations, they may affect the priority, coverage, and framing of the stories produced by the organization" (Correa & Harp, 2011).

We can assume that gatekeeping processes, including norms, social and cultural standards, and one's own standpoint and experience, affects media content. And, according to Correa & Harp (2011), "embedded cultural ideologies are also powerful forces pervading newsrooms and shaping news discourses." Research has consistently shown that women and men are represented by a dichotomy: "men as part of the public sphere and women within a 'domestic' frame, highlighting the ideas of care, compassion, and motherliness" (Correa & Harp's, 2011). Feminist cultural studies allow us to investigate power relations and how these relations exist within different dialogues and mediums (Gersch, 1998).

Inferences of Gendered Language

In his discussion on social identity, Hall (2000) explains that gender identity is an expression of power relations in society. He states that the components of gender identity

are constructed, "though not outside difference" (Hall, 2000, p. 17). Hall argues that "the

constitution of social identity is an act of power" (p. 18) and what may appear as a

unified identity is actually "constructed within the play of power and exclusion" (p.19).

These power relations will present themselves in discourse, thus language that may not

seem overtly sexist may in fact include inferential references to gender.

Preconceived Notions of Gender in the Political Realm

In gender and American politics, "the disconnect...between women and political

office is fed by the cultural premise that politics is a domain for masculinized behaviors,

messages, and professional experiences—creating a masculine stereotype for politicians"

(Meeks, 2012). We create stereotypes based on preconceived notions – these stereotypes

are influenced by our viewpoints on specific topics, often causing them to be contained

within a specific arena, or context. Meeks (2012) operates under the historical assumption

that American politics are highly masculinized. In her comparison between two news

stations, one male-dominated and the second female-dominated, she discovers that

"overall news coverage emphasized women's novelty more so than men's, and regardless

of perceived gender congruence, women received more political issue and character trait

coverage than men."

Additionally, Meeks (2012) found that the women in her study "received more

feminized and masculinized political issue and character trait coverage than men," thus

"women who seek a gender-congruent strategy may receive less coverage of their more

'feminized' platform." Gender scholars have also put an emphasis on the so called

'descriptive representation' of women in politics and the interrelationship between

6

societal structures and how they shape political actors' goals and strategies (Waylen, 2012).

When confronted with a new candidate who is female, voters often use a category-based knowledge of women to understand her and her political platform (Chang & Hitchon, 2004). For example, voters may "expect her to be compassionate toward disadvantaged and minority populations" (p. 197). Thus, when considering a political candidate, the information available to voters is crucial in influencing the level of schematic processing that will occur.

Individuals will also often employ a process known as "fill in a gap," or default processing, meaning that when information is missing or vague, one is likely to make assumptions based on information already in his or her mental structures (Taylor & Crocker, 1981). Communication surrounding political campaigns often relies on gender schemas that are the "mental representation of the category of traits, attitudes, and behaviors that are traditionally associated with men or women" (Chang & Hitchon, 2004). These become particularly apparent in the comparison of male and female candidates, particularly when an individual must generate an evaluation or fill in missing information about what the candidate may be like.

Media Coverage of Female Candidates

The political sphere has long been a masculine space – something that has been fed by the cultural belief that politics is a domain for masculine behaviors (Meeks, 2012). For women who do not adhere to what is considered a traditional female gender role, a subtype is created for her that incorporates more masculine traits (Meeks, 2012). Thus, it

is very important to remember sexism and stereotypes when theorizing about news coverage of both male and female candidates (Falk 2008).

In many instances of news coverage, female candidates are referred to by their first names (Falk, 2008). Murray (2010) explains that in the reporting of female political candidates, the media has a noticeable tendency to use a woman's first name, "either alone or in conjunction with her surname, whereas men are more often referred to only by their surname" (p. 13). With this come two damaging effects. First, "if used alone it implies familiarity and warmth rather than authority and gravitas," and second, "it may indicate unfamiliarity if used repeatedly with the woman's surname, as if to suggest that the candidate is new and still requires introduction to voters" (p.13).

But, use of a candidate's first name does not always indicate sexism, as familiarity or the need for other distinguishing factors may be at play. For example, Lawrence & Rose (2010) noted that reporters frequently used "Senator" or "Hillary" to distinguish Clinton from her husband.

A final thing to take into consideration when interpreting media coverage is the fact that a lack of media coverage can "speak loudly of gender bias" – such as when leading media outlets do not call out an occurrence of sexism or sexist speech (Lawrence & Rose, 2010, p. 169). In this case, the missing coverage (so to speak) indicates an inherent gender bias and mainstream media's failure at pointing out such.

Coverage of Hillary Clinton's 2008 Campaign

It is important to consider Clinton's foray into masculine space of the political sphere as a historical one, since she's gone further than any woman before in a presidential contest. Because of this historical significance, there are several scholars who

have discussed the claims of media bias during coverage of Clinton during her 2008 campaign (Lawrence & Rose, 2010; Parry-Giles, 2014).

The "Horse Race"

Lawrence & Rose (2010) explain that, in general, contemporary news coverage of candidates is negative in nature (p. 161). Candidates are up against a constant barrage of public scrutiny. For this reason, and because of both hers and her husband's very public histories, everything Clinton does possesses political risk. "To some she is the bright young woman giving Wellesley College's first student graduation speech, or a mold-breaking First Lady giving global voice to the cause of children and women; but to many others (or, perhaps, to many at the same time), she is an imperious interloper: the quintessential Rorschach test" (Lawrence & Rose, 2010, p. 102). In 2008, the Clinton campaign repeatedly complained that the media had covered Obama "far less critically than Senator Clinton" (Lawrence & Rose, p. 146).

Lawrence & Rose (2010) further explain that the question of unfair media coverage during Clinton's 2008 campaign had both a normative and empirical side (p.149). It was normative in the sense of whether or not the media were objective in their coverage of the election and empirical because media coverage of Clinton was far more negative than that of Obama. And yet, as Obama became the primary candidate, news coverage of his campaign became more negative in nature.

Lawrence & Rose's (2010) findings conclude that although "outright sexism was not absent from mainstream news, it was not as widespread as many of the media critics seemed to believe" (p. 149). During Clinton's first race, a widespread misconception was that Clinton would receive gendered coverage because she is a woman. Yet, only 6

9

percent of the news article examined contained such coverage (Lawrence & Rose, 2010, p. 166). In their total sample, Bill Clinton was mentioned in thirty percent of news articles (Lawrence & Rose, 2010, p. 165). When it came to attention paid to physical appearance and candidates' emotions, coverage was small and the media outlets discussed each of the Democratic candidates equally. Overall, the authors reported that female candidates received less coverage than their male counterparts, but the coverage they did receive didn't emphasize appearance. In addition, Clinton was referred to more frequently by her first name (by choice). And finally, they report that a large negative theme in coverage of Clinton was on her viability for office, questioning her ability to successfully complete the duties required.

Perceived Masculinity and Authenticity

Parry-Giles (2014) work on Clinton's 2008 campaign surmises that "when Hillary Clinton entered the ultimate of masculine spaces – a presidential contest no women had successfully traversed before – certain news frames shifted from a focus on Clinton's feminism to her alleged masculinity, with explicit references to male body parts" (p. 177-178). Parry-Giles found that coverage of Clinton demonstrated that the media is committed to "keep pace with the historic actions of political women like Clinton, helping chip away at the layers of sexism in political life and the stereotypical pull towards binary logic" (Parry-Giles, 2014, p. 193). "The more positive framing of Clinton's power was reinforced through the discussion of her impressive poll numbers" (p. 194).

Contrary to much of Lawrence & Rose's work, Parry-Giles' work suggests that there are both subtle and unsubtle ways that the media reinforces the masculine nature of

politics. Yet, it is at this crossroads of politics and gender, that exists a divide between how much stereotypical gender roles still have a hand in politics and candidate coverage. "Women are chastised for being too much of a feminist, being too much like a man, being too shrill in their public performances, or for being too emotional and dependent on men" (Parry-Giles, 2014, p. 181). Similar to this authenticity dilemma that many women in politics face, Meeks (2012) suggests that women need to assume more masculine attributes (due to voters focus on such) and "thus risk being perceived as gender-inauthentic" (p. 180).

Research Questions

As previously mentioned, in general, news coverage of all candidates is negative in nature. And as a candidate advances further along the path to election, earning favor in the eyes of voters, coverage is most likely to become more negative. Thus, in the footsteps of Lawrence & Rose (2010), it is vital to distinguish "negative" media coverage from "sexist" coverage. We must cull out "gendered" language – meaning that preconceived notions of gender shape the tone of the coverage.

In the years since Clinton's 2008 presidential campaign, has that much changed? Is media coverage of her 2015 campaign reminiscent of the same themes of her previous campaign? Although much research has been conducted on media coverage of Hillary Clinton throughout her career, along with much discussion of how gender roles play out in both the offline and digital media spheres, there has been little research into Clinton's most recent campaign to see what, if anything, has changed. The following research questions will dive deep into this topic:

RQ1: Is the media's portrayal of Hillary Clinton's presidential race focused on her gender, and if so, what is the tone of the message (i.e. negative or positive) as to her

11

being female? Among the outlets examined, does this message differ between media identified as liberal and conservative?

RQ2: What are the descriptors used to describe Clinton? Do they represent positive, negative or neutral frames? Do they also differ between news outlets?

RQ3: How does 2015 media coverage compare to coverage of Clinton during her 2008 campaign to become the Democratic nominee? Are many of the same themes present or have new themes emerged?

CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGY

Selection of Coverage Timeframe

Research focused on online articles from four mainstream news media sources during a four-month long snapshot of Clinton's 2015 political campaign to become the Democratic nominee – from September 1, 2015 through December 31, 2015. This four-month time frame is modest by design because it was a part of a graduate thesis. The small "sweet spot" captured by this four-month period occurs before the state primaries and caucuses had begun, yet after the media narrative had the chance to become more developed due to the slew of coverage beginning with the primary debates. This snapshot is necessary for the reasons that Lawrence & Rose (2010) explained – in general, news coverage of candidates is negative in nature. So, this study aims to collect coverage before candidates gain more favor, and negativity in coverage increases, as they advance further along the path towards election.

For the 2016 presidential election, the debate schedule began over a year prior when *Fox News* hosted the first primary debate on August 6, 2015 (*The Washington Post*, 2016). It can be argued that this first debate set in motion an increase in media coverage that would only grow as the final election date neared – during this pre-caucus period at the end of 2015, media reports are more focused on portrayals of the candidates' and their campaigns and less on the build-up of disagreements and personal attacks gaining momentum as the competition advances. Additionally, after the caucuses begin, the media narrative will shift to follow candidates along the state caucus trail and the winner of each state. As a consequence, media commentary, including the chosen candidate and

message, is at the whim of caucus results and timing. For example, Iowa and New Hampshire, the states that hold the first primaries, historically attract the most media attention during the *entire* primary season (Mellman, 2012).

In summary, the timeline from September 1, 2015 through December 31, 2001, was chosen because it provides a manageable snapshot of media coverage just before state primaries and caucuses are set to begin. After this date, much of the media coverage that appears focuses on Clinton's attempt to win support from individual states and delegates. Because the aim of this study is to determine the tone and main themes that appear in the media's portrayal of Clinton's campaign, a large volume of coverage about the state caucuses could potentially water down results (if it were to appear as a main theme in data collected). And, coverage of the caucuses is not relevant to the aim of this study – as outlined by the three research questions.

Sample of News Coverage

The selected media outlets include *The Wall Street Journal, The Economist, Fox News* and *MSNBC*. These four outlets are categorized as 'mainstream media' using research conducted by Pew Research Center (2014). In order to decrease political ideological bias in the data collected, this list of news outlets was selected to represent both conservative and liberal ideologies, based on trust (see *Appendix A*). Pew identified *The Wall Street Journal* and *The Economist* as two of the "most trusted" news outlets in America evenly across the board, regardless of liberal and conservative ideologies. *Fox News* and *MSNBC* are comparable outlets in size and type of news reports, yet *MSNBC* is consistently more trusted by liberals and consistently more distrusted than trusted by conservatives. Conversely, *Fox News* is more trusted than distrusted by conservatives and

more distrusted than trusted by liberals. Compete reports (2016) that each outlet received the following number of unique monthly visitors through the end of 2015: *The Wall Street Journal* over 15 million, *The Economist* just under 4 million, *MSNBC* over 5 million and *Fox News* just over 25 million.

Only online articles from each of these publications were used for data collection, as this analysis is of online media coverage of Clinton's political campaign. Relevant online articles from the previously mentioned publications were randomly selected. To alleviate a potential ideological skew, and to accurately represent ideological bias in both readership and trust, the total number collected was an even 5 percent (5%) from each of the four publications. Collecting an even percentage of data from each outlet enabled conclusions to be formed using the results and themes that emerged, without an uneven skew or over-representation from one of the publications. It also allowed data to be sortable by publication and trust assigned by the two political parties represented in the outlets chosen, for the discussion and conclusions following the study.

In order to collect the archived articles from the aforementioned dates, the advanced search setting was used on each outlet's website. Online articles from each publication were collected using the following search term: "Hillary Clinton campaign." This selected term cut down search results by the thousands from "Hillary Clinton," and culled down results to include articles about Clinton that are more relevant for the purposes of the study. Search results were then sorted by date and only included articles (i.e. excluding blogs, stand-alone photos, etc.). Photos that were included as a part of an article were catalogued with the rest of the data for that article. Hillary Clinton had to be the main topic or focus for the articles selected. For example, an article was not selected

(even if it came up during the search), if it focused on another candidate and just had a brief mention of Clinton. If the resulting five percent of the total search query for a publication was uneven, it was always rounded up if results were .5 or over, or down if under .5, according to standardized mathematical rules. Because researchers were selecting five percent from each outlet's search results, the final articles were randomly collected by selecting every twentieth article from search results.

The search results using the guidelines outlined above resulted in the following numbers:

1. *The Wall Street Journal* – 877 total articles; 44 articles were randomly selected.

2. *The Economist* – 451 total articles; 23 articles were randomly selected.

3. *MSNBC* – 648 total articles, 32 articles were randomly selected.

4. *Fox News* – 1,467 total articles; 73 articles were randomly singled selected.

Coding and Coder Inter Reliability

During and after article collection, all one hundred and seventy-two news articles were coded using a single coding scheme (see *Appendix B*) developed by the primary researcher. The standardized coding protocol, developed specifically for this study, was designed to collect and organize the data from each news article using a framework provided by the research questions. Completed coding sheets were organized by publication and catalogued for data sorting. The coding scheme catalogued the following information: news outlet name; subhead; title; date published paragraph count; type of story; place article appears on website; quotes from Clinton and sources; the tone of any photos included in selected articles; descriptors used to describe Clinton's personal characteristics (i.e. physical appearance, clothing, hair, facial expressions, etc.);

descriptors used to portray Clinton's political platform and/or campaign; comparisons between other candidates; sources used for direct/paraphrased quotations; overarching main theme(s); key words or phrases used to express the main theme/topic; the overall tone of the article; mentions of Clinton's gender; and the language (i.e. words and descriptors) that were used to discuss her gender.

Two coders participated in this study – each was assigned a coder ID number. The primary researcher used the coding ID "1" and the secondary coder used "2." Before coding began, the primary researcher reviewed the coding scheme (see *Appendix B*) with the secondary coder, providing coding guidelines as well as training on tips and best practices for consistency (see *Appendix C*). During this training session, the primary and secondary coders went into great detail for each question from the coding scheme and discussed examples of the type of data this study aimed to collect. A sample of ten articles was then tested for coder inter reliability, during which both coders were assigned the same articles from the study. The coded results – completed individually by each coder – were then discussed as a group. The group discussion focused on differences in coding scheme answers, why these differences exist and how to mitigate them moving forward, ensuring unity among final study results. The primary researcher was also available throughout the completion of data collection, answering questions and clarifying things with the secondary coder, as needed. At the conclusion of data collection, the primary researcher reviewed all data collected by the secondary coder, explicating details from the second coder when needed.

CHAPTER IV

RESULTS AND FINDINGS

This study analyzed one hundred and seventy-two articles, published online from September 1, 2015 through December 31, 2015, in four mainstream news outlets. *Fox News* received the highest number of coded articles, with a total of seventy-three. *The Wall Street Journal* had the second most coverage, with forty-four coded articles. *MSNBC* and *The Economist* came in third and fourth, with thirty-two and twenty-three coded articles, respectively.

Emerging Main Themes

During data analysis, eight dominant themes in media coverage emerged. These topic buckets included authenticity, emails, support, competition, policy/politics, Benghazi, fluff and expertise (see Table 1 for operational definitions). From the keywords and phrases used to express the main theme of each article, a main overarching theme was determined for each. This was the dominant topic that took up the largest amount of content within that specific news piece (see Figure 1). Two of these main themes are a direct consequence of the news context during the time period of this study. The first, "emails" is in reference to the ongoing federal investigation into Clinton's use of a private server for her email storage while serving as Secretary of State from 2001 to 2009. The second, "Benghazi," is regarding the controversy and Congressional investigation into Clinton's role in an attack on a U.S. diplomatic outpost on September 11, 2012 in Benghazi, Libya during which four Americans were killed.

The most widespread theme that appeared in *The Wall Street Journal* was "competition" (see Figure 2), which appeared in just over a third of the articles from this

publication (38.7%). The second and third themes were "policy" (20.5%) and "emails" (15.9%). As might be expected, when considering the editorial focus of *The Economist,* "policy" was the main theme of almost half (43.5%) of the articles studied (see Figure 4). "Competition" was the second most common theme, appearing in a quarter of the articles (26.1%). "Support" was third, appearing in thirteen percent (13.0%). For *MSNBC* (see Figure 5) "policy" (37.5%) was the most prevalent theme. Both "competition" and "support" were the second most prevalent (18.8%). The top three main themes for *Fox News* (see Figure 6) were "competition" (26.0%), "policy" (19.2%) and "emails" (16.4%).

Overall Language

Almost half of the total articles examined (44.2%) were neutral in their overall language used to describe Clinton (see Table 2). Twenty-three percent (23.3%) portrayed her in a positive light and about a third (32.6%) in negative light. When it came down to specific outlets, *The Wall Street Journal* and *The Economist* mainly used neutral language to portray Clinton. *The Wall Street Journal* mainly wielded neutral language to talk about Clinton (45.5%) and only around twenty percent of articles were each positive and negative. Almost two-thirds of the articles from *The Economist* represented Clinton in a neutral light (69.9%) and less than twenty percent each of articles were either negative or positive.

The articles from *MSNBC* were split almost in half in the language used to talk about Clinton. Just over half (56.3%) were positive and just under half (43.8%) were neutral. None of the articles from *MSNBC* used negative language when talking about Clinton. And, when it came to *Fox News,* just over half (54.8%) of the articles relied on

negative language to represent Clinton. Around a third (35.6%) used neutral language and just fewer than ten percent (9.6%) used negative discourse.

The coding sheet included the following categories – titles used for Hillary Clinton, photos included within articles, personal characteristics and campaign descriptors, mention of Bill Clinton, comparisons with other candidates and direct mention to Hillary Clinton's gender (See *Appendix B*). The findings for each category are as follows.

Titles Used

MSNBC and *Fox News* were the only two outlets to reference Clinton using just her first name (see Figures 6 and 7). Yet, this use of Clinton's first name was less than seven percent (6.3%) out of the total articles examined from *MSNBC*. Twenty-three percent (23.3%) of the total *Fox News* articles collected used "Hillary" when talking about Clinton.

Though used very infrequently (once in each case), the strangest titles that emerged included: "Ms. Hilly" (*The Economist*), the "Madonna of Politics" (*Fox News*), "Goddess" (*Fox News*) and a "hawk" (*Fox News)*.

Photos of Clinton Included with Articles

Over half (53.3%) of the articles selected from *The Wall Street Journal* were coded "n/a" – meaning the article did not contain a photo or the photo did not feature Clinton (see Figure 8). Around twenty percent (22.2%) of the articles that did contain photos portrayed Clinton in a positive light and 20 percent (20.0%) were neutral (see *Appendix C* for coding guidelines). In *The Economist*, over 60 percent (60.9%) of the articles were not applicable – 30 percent (30.4%) depicted Clinton in a neutral light (see

Figure 9).

Almost 40 percent (38.7%) of the *MSNBC* articles were coded not applicable, and over half (54.8%) were neutral (see Figure 11). And, almost half (42.5%) of the articles selected from *Fox News* were coded n/a and the other half (46.6%) were neutral (see Figure 11).

Personal Characteristics

When it came to personal descriptors used to portray Clinton, almost three quarters of all of the articles (67.1%) examined did not include direct adjectives in relation to her personal characteristics or personality. Of those that did, the two words most used to describe Clinton were "liar" and "untrustworthy" (see Figure 12). "Liar" appeared seven times in *Fox News* and once in *MSNBC* (4.7% of all 172 articles). "Untrustworthy" was used seven times (4.1%), entirely in *Fox News.* The second most used were "experienced" (1.7%) and "leadership" (1.2%).

Descriptors used in each publication were categorized into three categories – positive, negative and neutral. If more than one descriptor was used in the same article, the overall tone of the sum of the descriptors was used to determine the label.

Language was classified as positive if it cast Clinton in a favorable light. Descriptors such as "leader," "strength" and "helpful" would fall into this category. Descriptions were labeled negative if they cast Clinton in an unsavory light, or if they assigned a negative connotation to the candidate. Examples include "struggled," "unlikable, "liar" and "disgusting." Neutral descriptors were anything that did not fit into either of the two categories – language that did not add or take away from a reader's perception of Clinton. For example, descriptors like "powerful," "agreement" and

"urged" would be classified as neutral.

Of the articles that did use descriptors to depict Clinton (i.e. physical appearance, clothing, hair, facial expressions, etc.) almost 12 percent (11.2%) were negative, ten percent (9.9%) were positive and five percent (5.2%) neutral (see Table 2). *Fox News* had the most negative descriptors with almost 18 percent (17.8%) and *The Economist* had the highest occurrence of positive descriptors, with just over 20 percent (21.7%). Personal descriptors used to talk about Clinton in *The Wall Street Journal* were almost split in half between negative and positive tones.

Quotes from sources did not greatly affect the number of descriptors used in each article, for barely any of the articles included personal descriptors in the sources quoted. Only around ten percent (9.9%) of quotes from articles contained descriptors. Seven percent (7.0%) of these personal descriptors were negative (see Table 2). *Fox News* had the highest count of personal descriptors among quotes, with almost ten percent (9.6%) of articles being negative.

Campaign Descriptors

The same methodology was used to classify campaign and political platform descriptors into positive, negative and neutral categories. Similarly, almost two thirds of all of the articles (62.2%) examined did not include direct campaign descriptors and just over one third (37.2%) did. Of those that did, the two words most used to describe Clinton's campaign were "experience" and "lead" (see Figure 12). *Fox News* used "experience" three times, and *MSNBC* and *The Wall Street Journal* each used it once (for a total of 2.9% of the 172 articles). Both *Fox News* and *The Wall Street Journal* used "lead" twice, for a total of 2.3 percent overall.

These campaign descriptors (i.e. adjectives and comparisons) used to portray Clinton's political platform and/or campaign were classified negative, positive or neutral using the same process as the personal descriptors – if more than one descriptor was used in the same article, the overall tone of the sum of the descriptors was used to determine the label. Examples of positive descriptors include "best," "strong," "bolstered," and "leadership." Negative descriptors would include "contradiction," "weak," "pathetic" and "unqualified." And those classified as neutral include "experience," "full-throated," "progressive" and "control."

Almost eighteen percent (17.4%) of all campaign characteristics used were negative, twelve percent (11.6%) were neutral and just under 6 percent (5.8%) positive (see Table 16). About a quarter (26.1%) of campaign characteristics used in *The Economist* were negative – the same was true for *Fox News* (21.9%). When it came to sources quoted by reporters, only two percent (2.3%) of articles contained campaign descriptors, all of which were negative (see Table 3). These included "liability," "contradiction," "offensive," "disgusting" and "outrageous."

Mention of Bill Clinton

Less than a third (21.5%) of the total articles examined mention Bill (see Table 4). Each outlet, in turn, reflected this low number. Of them, *The Wall Street Journal* mentioned him the most – a little over a third (34.1%). This does not necessarily indicate gendered language. As Lawrence & Rose (2010) suggest, ungendered mentions of Bill could occur when an author wished to distinguish Bill from his wife. But, it could go to show that Bill Clinton appears much less frequently in news coverage than one may have initially believed due to the number of his mentions found in Clinton's 2008 campaign

(Lawrence & Rose, 2010) and both Clinton's long, intertwined political resumes

(including the eight years they spent in the White House during his presidency).

Comparisons with Other Candidates

In the articles collected, Clinton was most compared with her opponent Bernie

Sanders (see Figure 14). This outcome was consistent across all media outlets. Almost

half (45.5%) of the articles that compared Clinton with another candidate in *The Wall*

Street Journal compared her to Sanders. Donald Trump was the second most mentioned

candidate for comparisons, but only a low eleven percent (11.4%) of articles did such

(see Figure 15). Less than a quarter (21.7%) of candidate comparisons in *The Economist*

were also Sanders and the publication did not include many mentions of other candidates

(see Figure 16).

Almost half (46.9%) of candidate comparisons in articles by *MSNBC* (see Figure

17) were also Sanders and the outlet also had high mentions of Trump (31.3%) and

Martin O'Malley (18.8%). And finally, in *Fox News* almost forty percent (38.4%) of

instances where Clinton was compared to another candidate were in reference to Sanders.

All other mentions of other candidates remained under ten percent – *Fox News* had the

most variety of mentions out of all of the news outlets (see Figure 18).

Direct References to Gender

Only a little more than eight percent (8.7%) of the articles directly mentioned

Clinton's gender (see Table 5). By outlet, this came to four articles (9.1%) in *The Wall*

Street Journal, three of these mentions were neutral and one positive. An example of one

of these neutral mentions is an author's reference to Clinton's leadership during one of

the Democratic debates, saying it was a "one-woman debate" (Meckler, 2015). The

positive mention was in reference to Clinton being potentially the first female president (Taranto, 2015).

Two articles (8.7%) from *The Economist* directly referenced Clinton's gender – both of these were positive. One of the two, titled "One-horse race," pointed towards one of Clinton's speeches, concluding that it would be historic to have a female president (*The Economist,* October 17, 2015).

In *MSNBC,* two articles (6.2%) mentioned Clinton's gender – one was a neutral mention and the other was positive. The neutral mention was one of humor – it described Clinton's guest appearance on *Jimmy Kimmel Live*. In his opening monologue, Kimmel joked about Clinton's prospects as the potential first female president. Clinton replied, "we need to have a woman be president, and then you would have more evidence to base your decision on" (Alba, 2015). The article with the positive reference to Clinton's gender discussed Clinton "basking in the glow" of a group of female senators, each who believed it was time that the country to elect a woman president (Seitz-Wald, 2015).

And finally, a total of seven articles (9.6%) from *Fox News* referenced Clinton's gender – three of these were negative, three neutral and one positive. One of the negative articles negatively discusses Clinton using her gender to her advantage during a debate, saying, "she had the best command of the stage and played up being a woman" (Erickson, 2015). Another portrayed Clinton's gender as a weakness and played into historical gender stereotypes, explaining that when Clinton is guarded and only warm in private she may be perceived by voters as inauthentic – "the result is that a woman who is warm in private comes across in public as guarded and legalistic, which erodes her connection with average folks" (Kurtz, 2015).

Another one of the articles (by the same author), titled "Can a 'warmer' Hillary use the media to boost her plummeting polls," brings this same sentiment to light. Yet this time as a neutral mention. In this case, the author explains that Clinton's gender puts her at a disadvantage due to voters' perception of female candidates. The author explains that one of the "troubles" of being a female president is being perceived by voters as inauthentic for not showing "vulnerable" emotion, yet needing to appear "unbreakable" to be taken seriously as a candidate (Kurtz, 2015).

The last article, the only positive mention of gender from *Fox News*, involved Clinton's leadership qualities. The author quotes Mimi Kennedy, an actress in the American sitcom *Mom*. Kennedy explains, "all of the leadership qualities Hillary has to lead Bernie has—except her gender—and one might say a roster of corporate and very wealthy supporters" (Johnson, 2015).

CHAPTER V

DISCUSSION

As Lawrence & Rose (2010) noted, it is vital to distinguish "negative" media coverage from "sexist" coverage. "Sexist," or gendered language, occurs when the tone of the coverage is shaped by preconceived notions of gender. As such, gendered coverage would include anything that incorporates traditional or stereotypical gender roles, or something that plainly states or alludes to Clinton's gender as a hindrance or advantage to her campaign – this excludes articles that refer to, or provide an explanation of, the systemic problems associated with institutionalized sexism. An example of gendered coverage can be found in the article "Clinton's 2016 makeover the latest in long line of resets," selected from *Fox News:*

"After husband Bill Clinton lost the governorship and was running again in 1982, Hillary Clinton started wearing makeup, updated her wardrobe and began introducing herself as Mrs. Bill Clinton, not Hillary Rodham, author-journalist James B. Stewart wrote in his 1997 book Blood Sport. 'Hillary got the message that Arkansas voters didn't like women to flaunt their independence'" (*Fox News, 2015).*

An example of negative coverage would include negative statements about Clinton, her campaign, poll numbers, her email controversy, Benghazi, etc. For example, an article from *The Economist*, titled "A turn for the worse," states: "What is not in dispute is that Mrs Clinton's poll ratings have taken a hit. Recent analysis by Gallup

found that when voters think about Mrs Clinton their most common associations are with 'e-mail'" (M.D. & The Data Team, 2015). Negative coverage in another article, from *Fox News,* explains that Clinton and President Barack Obama should be less politically correct and take a stronger stance on combating the terrorist group, ISIS. The author states that, "the actions and rhetoric from President Obama and Hillary Clinton show that they are unwilling to take the difficult but necessary steps needed to keep us safe" (Brown, 2015).

This negative coverage is not overtly gendered, especially when considering a candidate may incur more negative coverage as the "horse race" advances. And yet, while there was very little overtly sexist language in the news, there were more subtle forms of sexism that emerged in these three areas of coverage. As Hall (2000) noted, although discourse may appear unified, it is "constructed within the play of power and exclusion" (p.19). In this study, there are three instances that would be indicative of the use of inferential gendered language among the news articles examined. The first would potentially be the use of Clinton's first name, the second in personal and campaign descriptors and the third in the emergence of main themes. The following will include a more in depth discussion of the potential occurrences of inferential gendered language in each of these three areas of coverage and direct mentions of gender, in addition to findings from new themes from Clinton's narrative and emerging differences between all four outlets.

Using Her First Name

MSNBC and *Fox News* were the only two outlets to reference Clinton using just her first name (see Figures 6 and 7). Yet, this use of Clinton's first name was less than

seven percent (6.3%) out of the total outlets examined from *MSNBC.* Twenty-three

percent (23.3%) of the total *Fox News* articles collected used "Hillary" when talking

about Clinton. It is important to determine if this was truly gendered use of Clinton's first

name, which could implicate warmth rather than authority or perversely indicate that she

would require introduction to voters (Murray, 2010). On the other hand, use of Clinton's

first name could also occur out of her preference (as seen in campaign materials), out of

need to distinguish her from her husband or when other candidates were also being

referred to by their first names. Further research would have to be conducted to determine

if this use was in fact gendered. Though anecdotal, negative nicknames used as titles

were also almost entirely from *Fox News,* including the "Madonna of Politics" (*Fox

News*), "Goddess" (*Fox News*) and a "hawk" (*Fox News).*

"Gendered" Descriptors

Almost three quarters of all of the articles (68.6%) examined did not include

direct adjectives to in relation to Clinton's personal characteristics or personality. Of

those that did, the two most used adjectives were "liar" and "untrustworthy." Similarly,

almost two thirds of all of the articles (62.8%) examined did not include direct campaign

descriptors. The descriptors that did appear were "experience" and "lead." Both could be

attributed to questions of Clinton's viability for office – similar to what was present in

Lawrence & Rose's (2010) findings – and yet these only appeared in around two percent

of the articles collected. In total, the descriptors used in publications (see Figure 12), both

in the reporter's language and in quotes from selected sources, were over half (52.0%)

negative and almost a quarter each positive (23.6%) and neutral (24.4%). This, of course,

is not indicative of the media's preference of Clinton, but instead a reflection of public

perception and scrutiny during the beginning of the race to become party nominee.

The Wall Street Journal reflected this skew in coverage (see Figure 20), with just over a third (40.9%) of the descriptors used in articles being negative. Descriptors used in *The Economist* were also an even half negative (see Figure 21). *MSNBC* had the least negative of a percentage from all four outlets, with less than a quarter (21.3%) of coverage with descriptors being negative (see Figure 22). And more than half (64.9%) of the descriptors used in *Fox News* were negative (see Figure 23).

As previously mentioned, there is a difference between gendered and negative language. Thus, these conclusions speak to the candidate and party preference of the outlet and not necessarily any institutional sexism. Another study – one that compared the nature of the media coverage between both male and female candidates (such as Clinton and Sanders) – would have to be conducted in order to determine if this negative language was sexist in nature.

Additional Mentions of Gender

Thirteen out of the fifteen articles that mentioned Clinton's gender referred to it in a positive light or pointed to her gender, and inherent sexism in our society, as a reason for obstacles she has faced. The three articles that did not use Clinton's gender in a positive way, relying on it to position her as a champion for changing the gendered political landscape, cited her gender as a reason she should 'naturally' garner support from women voters. This in itself could be considered sexist – assuming that a voter should choose a candidate solely based on the reason that they are both the same gender. But, it also could be an unbiased reference to the fact that many women are in fact rallying around Clinton because of her historical position (and that some of them

30

changing their minds could also shift her numbers in the polls).

Two of the fifteen articles that referenced Clinton's gender did it in reference to how her gender would affect the support of women voters. Six placed her gender in a positive light in support of Clinton's candidacy and the final three directly remarked on her gender and the difficulty female presidential candidates face regarding authenticity – candidates may need to appear being strong and "unbreakable," and yet the public may perceive them as being inauthentic in lieu of the candidate showing vulnerable emotion. Out of all of these, only three were negative in reference.

For example, one of the articles from Fox News explains that, "the result is that a woman who is warm in private comes across in public as guarded and legalistic, which erodes her connection with average folks" (Kurtz, 2015). A second, also from *Fox News* (2015) commented on the evolution of Clinton's outward projection. And, a third references Clinton using her gender to gain support from voters, saying that (during one of the debates), "she had the best command of the stage and played up being a woman" (Erickson, 2015). The only negative direct references to Clinton's gender occurred in Fox News. Yet, these three articles only comprise four percent (4.1%) of the seventy-three articles collected from the publication.

Surprisingly, direct references to Clinton's gender were present in the same percentage of articles from each news outlet across the board, save for *Fox News* (as previously discussed). In the other three, the percentage of gendered language remained under one tenth of a percent (0.1%) of the total articles analyzed. *MSNBC* had a slightly lower occurrence of gendered language (.06%) and *Fox News* a slightly higher one (10.0%). Though incredibly small, this could be due to inherent gender bias present in the

31

political party alignment and ideologies for each publication – *MSNBC* is more liberal and focused on the Democratic Party and *Fox News* more conservative and aligned with the Republican Party (Pew Research, 2014), to which one could attribute more traditional gender roles.

Although only present in a small percentage of the total media coverage studied, and as such is an outlier, it is important to examine the occurrences of this gendered language in order to interpret why it is present. Sexist language was not present in a large number of articles, but the themes that emerged – such as Clinton's questioned inauthenticity – are reminiscent of the authenticity dilemma that Parry-Giles (2014) suggests many women in politics face. It is also suggestive of Meeks (2012) assumption that female candidates must assume traits that are historically considered more masculine during a quest for political office, often causing them to seem gender inauthentic.

Main Emerging Themes

There was not even a hint of gendered language in the main themes that emerged. In fact, all of the 8 main emerging themes focused on fairly objective subjects, policy and competition. *The Wall Street Journal* and *Fox News* were the only outlets with the theme "emails" in the top three (it was the third most prevalent theme for each). This is interesting considering that, due to such an intense focus on Clinton's emails, that this theme would not be more present in all of the outlets. None of the articles collected from *MSNBC* or *The Economist* focused on Clinton's emails as the main theme. Also contrary is the assumption that a large sum of coverage would focus on "Benghazi"– Clinton's hearing occurred during the period that articles were collected for this study, yet this theme appeared low in all publications article count. *MSNBC* was the only outlet for this

main theme to appear in the top three (it was third). Eight percent (8.2%) of *Fox News* articles had this as the main theme, four percent (4.4%) for *The Economist* and none (0.0%) of the articles from *The Wall Street Journal.* Although, some peculiar titles and subjects emerged in the articles selected – like "Choir replaces Jesus with Hillary in gospel song" and "Hillary Clinton speaks out against Pumpkin Spice Lattes" – such examples are anecdotal.

Overall Differences Between Outlets

One of the most interesting findings from the study is perhaps the holistic perspective the results provide for the reporting of each outlet. The two that were identified by Pew (2014) to be "more trusted" by either political ideal, *MSNBC* more trusted by liberals and *Fox News* more trusted by conservatives, were, in fact, more similar in their reporting in numerous cases. Those that were trusted more evenly across the board, *The Wall Street Journal* and *The Economist*, were actually more skewed from one another in some cases. Overall, this data suggests that *Fox News* may not be as subjective (in its coverage of Clinton) as some critics may believe.

Although selected as the outlet that was more trusted by liberals and more distrusted by conservatives, *MSNBC* was the most "impartial," for the purposes of this study, out of the four. Not only was factual reporting of policy the most prevalent theme, this was the only outlet to not have any negative photographic depictions of Clinton. Additionally, none of the articles from *MSNBC* used negative language when talking about Clinton. In the overall tone, just over half (56.3%) were positive and just under half (43.8%) were neutral. Only two articles from *MSNBC* mentioned Clinton's gender. One was a neutral mention and the other was positive. In contrast, four articles from *The Wall*

Street Journal directly mentioned Clinton's gender. Still, it is important to recognize that this was an overwhelmingly small percent of the sample and not a dominant frame.

In the context of this small study, *Fox News'* coverage of Clinton was more impartial than one might first believe. This is particularly interesting because Clinton is the main contender of the opposite party from this "conservative" news network. The top main theme that did emerge from the outlet was coverage of other candidates and the debates. Overall, seven articles from *Fox News* – the highest out of all four outlets – referenced Clinton's gender. Yet, over half of these were either positive or neutral. This does not speak to the absence of gendered language, but what does is the lack of a high prevalence of gendered personal and campaign descriptors used by the four outlets.

New Themes from Clinton's Narrative

The Wall Street Journal mentioned Bill the most out of any other outlet – a little over a third (34.1%) of the articles referenced him. This aligns with the thirty percent Lawrence & Rose (2010) found in the articles collected during Clinton's 2008 race. The amount of Bill Clinton mentions hovers around the same number over seven years later, either indicating that most of the mentions of Bill in 2008 did not contribute to sexist language used when talking about Clinton or, when in reference to Bill, that sexist language has not changed. Mentions of Bill could be, as Lawrence & Rose (2010) suggest, to distinguish him from his wife.

Lawrence & Rose's (2010) findings also concluded that sexism was present in mainstream news, yet it was not as widespread as critics had believed. Only 6 percent of the news articles studied by the researchers contained gendered coverage. These low findings are similar to that of this study – mention of Hillary's gender appeared in less

34

than 8 percent (8.7%) of articles selected. As previously discussed, this does not directly point towards gendered coverage (as a comparison study between Clinton and another male candidate would have to be conducted to determine such), although it does provide an example of how small the potential space could be for sexist coverage in direct references to Clinton's gender. And finally, Lawrence & Rose reported that one of the most dominant negative themes in coverage of Clinton was her viability for office. Questions of Clinton's ability to successfully complete the duties required was not one of the 8 main emerging topics of this study.

Sexist language was present in a very small minority of the articles that directly mentioned Clinton's gender, but some of the (very infrequent) descriptors that did emerge, such as her questioned authenticity, are suggestive of Meeks (2012) hypothesis that women who do not adhere to what is considered a traditional female gender role are perceived as inauthentic as they enter the historically masculine political sphere. Parry-Giles (2014) work also brings to light the authenticity quandary many female politicians face. He explains, "because of the still underlying masculine nature of the public sphere, women's intrusion into such spaces may still appear as a violation of national proprietary and authentic womanhood" (p. 180).

Women's entrance into the political sphere is thus not-as-normalized as men. Another one of the articles from *Fox News*, titled "Can a 'warmer' Hillary use the media to boost her plummeting polls?" provides a snapshot of this in a quote from Michelle Goldberg of *The Nation* (Kurtz, 2015):

"A female candidate who was prone, as Biden is, to veering off script and

saying things she should not wouldn't seem frank and lovable. She would seem

sloppy and unstable. No woman could say on national television that she might be

too emotionally fragile to run for president, and still be seen as someone who

could actually run for president...Clinton is in a straitjacket. She's excoriated for

her inauthenticity, but also for whatever glimpses we get of her humanity: her

wrinkles, her laugh, her awkward fashion sense, her devotion to her philandering

husband."

This excerpt perfectly captures one of the main emerging themes in coverage of

Clinton, and new question raised by this study. Hillary Clinton seems to be caught in an

unprecedented space, both as the first female to come the closest to presidency in U.S.

history and as a candidate with such a public, storied past. This sentiment is evocative of

something Parry-Giles (2014) also found. He explains that in her autobiography, Clinton

addresses the authenticity dilemmas that women in politics often face – "People who

wanted me to fit into a certain box, traditionalist or feminist, would never be entirely

satisfied with me as me" (p. 180). One of the articles examined in this study, taken from

the *Wall Street Journal*, states Clinton saying, "I cannot imagine anyone being more of an

outsider than the first woman president" (Taranto, 2015). The author replies, "That might

be true of a President Fiorina, but Mrs. Clinton is as strongly positioned as she is

precisely because she is such an insider. Her husband held public office for nearly 22

years before she ever did."

As the potential first female president Clinton may consider herself an outsider.

As someone who's been a part of "the monarchy" of U.S. for over twenty years, she is an

insider. It appears that Clinton is stuck in a third space – an in-between from belonging in either place. Is it this space, and a lack of a category to fit her into, that makes her both so loved and yet hated for her inauthenticity at the same time? Someone who sits on the cusp of a transformative moment in U.S. history and yet also a public figure so highly charged with "scandal?"

CHAPTER VI

CONCLUSION

This small study performed a textual analysis of online, mainstream media coverage during Hillary Clinton's 2015 campaign to become the Democratic presidential nominee. Research explored the media's portrayal of Clinton in four mainstream news outlets to determine if the media were in fact focused on her gender, and if so, if the tone of this coverage was negative or positive. One of the most surprising conclusions is that none of the main themes, or topic buckets (see Table 1) that emerged were gendered. It is vital to consider if the language in the coverage that Clinton receives is not gendered, is the attention being paid to her (whether extra or less) the place where institutional sexism lies. This could be determined by conducting a larger study that compares the amount, type and topics of coverage of Clinton and another, male candidate.

The study also asked what descriptors were used to describe Clinton and her campaign and if the overall message and themes differed between the media identified as liberal and conservative (Pew, 2014). Almost three quarters of all of the articles (68.6%) examined did not include direct adjectives to in relation to Clinton's personal characteristics or personality and two thirds of all of the articles (62.8%) examined did not include direct campaign descriptors. The two most used personal descriptors were "liar" and "untrustworthy," yet these appeared in around only 4 percent of articles, each. The two most common campaign descriptors were "experience" and "lead." These also appeared in a very small number of selected articles, only around 2 percent each. One of the most fascinating findings was that the two outlets that were identified as "more trusted" by either political ideal, *MSNBC* and *Fox News*, were more similar in their

reporting. And, in various instances, the two outlets that were more evenly trusted by both political ideals, *The Wall Street Journal* and *The Economist*, were actually more skewed from one another.

The final question this study asked, was how did coverage of Clinton's 2015 campaign compare to that of her 2008 campaign? Mentions of Bill Clinton remain about the same number compared to Clinton's previous presidential campaign – although this may be making a stretch due to the size and differences between the two studies. Additionally, contrary to previous research on coverage of Clinton, questions of her viability for office was not one of the 8 main emerging topics of this study.

In general, any pre-existing gendered standpoints of journalists covering Clinton did not appear to influence their coverage of Hillary Clinton. The gatekeeping processes, including norms, social and cultural standards, and one's own standpoint and experience, seemed to have affected media content very little. This provides comfort when considering that voters will use a category-based knowledge of women to understand female political candidates and their platforms during the level of schematic processing required for reading about and selecting a candidate for office. One of the new trends in coverage that did emerge was the fact that Clinton seems to be caught in an third space – between being an insider, following her eight years spent in the White House, and an outsider, as the potential first female president.

We will only see the internet's influence grow as a discursive space, for the repositioning of preconceived notions of gender. The internet allows females to surpass pre-existing boundaries, and, as it would seem based on the findings of this study, mainstream news media does not appear to be as much of a main factor in preventing this

from happening.

Limitations and Future Research

Limitations of the study include the size and timeframe of the selected sample –
the sample size and timeframe were both limited by the fact that the research was a part
of a graduate thesis. The focus on just four mainstream news outlets provides an
additional limitation. A final limitation is that this study only looks at online media
coverage of Clinton, and that it does not go into detail on coverage of additional
candidates.

Thus, any future research should dive into a larger perspective of how the main
themes arising from mainstream media coverage shifted through the conclusion of
Clinton's campaign. Additional research would also compare mainstream media coverage
of the other Democratic candidates with Clinton, as well as candidates across party lines.
As the primary race progressed, did the candidate's hits and defensive discourse with one
another reflect more gendered-dialogue? A comparison of mainstream media coverage of
Clinton's and another male candidate's campaign (such as Bernie Sanders or Donald
Trump) would allow one to more closely point to sexism present in media coverage.
Future research should also explore the ways that both female and male candidates are
using media – social media and print newspapers – to control the message that is being
portrayed about their campaigns, and the gendered discourse that ensues in the comments
and engagement stemming from the broadcasted message. Is it then, in the comment
sections and social media shares of articles where the message is getting skewed with
gender bias? If so, as it stands, mainstream media may well be doing its part to wipe
clean the slate and build a political discourse lacking in gendered discourse and sexist

assumptions of political candidates.

Overall, this study provides a useful, though modest, commentary on the internet as a cultural text and the theory of Feminist Communication Studies. The context that the internet provides for an analysis between experiences of empowerment and alienation, the two biggest players in the struggle for power, in addition to the fact that newsrooms and news discourses are implanted with cultural ideologies (Correa & Harp, 2011), make the implications of this study very powerful. Because the medium of this study was online mainstream news coverage, we can conclude that a low amount of negative gendered coverage of Clinton provided by the newsroom "gatekeepers" may point to a decrease in institutionalized sexism.

The conclusions of this study also begin to extend the Muted Group Theory through the lens of Feminist Communications Studies, providing hope that society may be, in fact, evolving. The disadvantages provided by a male-dominated language structure (Kramarae, 1981) may be lessening, as both history and an increased level of awareness break the institutionalized mold. Women may be more free to express their alternative view of the world – all without having to transform their own models in terms of the received male system of expression.

In conclusion, there are both subtle and unsubtle ways that the media reinforces the ways which politics is still a masculine world. And the "cautionary tale for women interested in politics or other positions of leadership is most pronounced" (Parry-Giles, 2014, p.197). Yet, at the crossroads of politics and gender, we can see a fission beginning to form between how much stereotypical gender roles still have a hand in politics and candidate coverage. Will this shift in institutionalized sexism be enough to aid in the

election of the first female president in the history of the United States? Only time will

tell.

Appendix A: Trust levels of news sources by ideological group
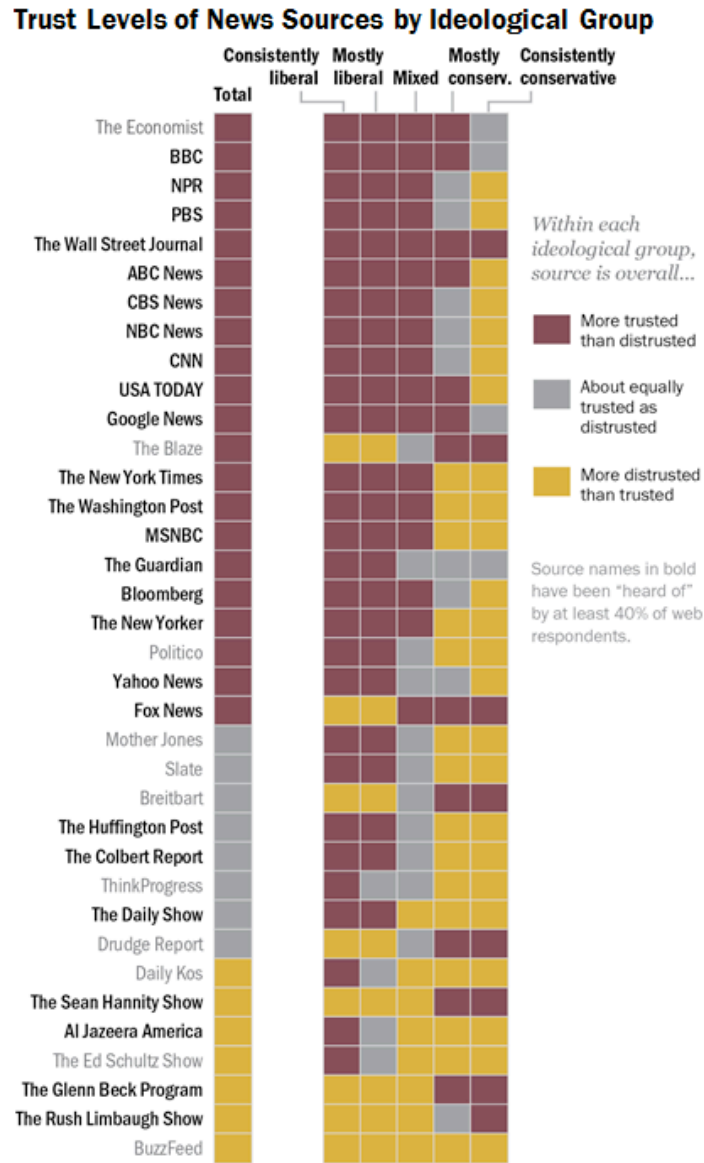
Source: Pew Research Center, 2014.

Appendix B: Coding Scheme

Article ID # _____   Coder ID # _____

1.   News outlet name:

2.   Article title:

3.   Subhead:

4.   Publication date (DD/MM/YY):

5.   Paragraph count of article:

6.   Type of story (circle one if mentioned):
Feature   News story   Opinion   Other

7.   Place article appears on website (i.e. section), if listed in article header:
Politics   Economics/Economy   Culture   Tech   Markets

Health   Elections   Equality   Society   U.S.

8.   Elements in story (circle applicable and provide details)
     a.   Quote from Hillary Clinton (copy quote as is – no other details necessary):
     b.   Photo (describe Hillary Clinton's expression/stance and any other defining
     characteristics of the photo – such as location and other people/objects included):

9.   If Hillary Clinton is featured in the photo, does the photo portray her in an overall
negative, positive or neutral light?

10. List all descriptors personal characteristics used to describe or depict Hillary Clinton
(i.e. physical appearance, clothing, hair, facial expressions, etc.):

11. List all descriptors (i.e. adjectives and comparisons) used to portray Hillary Clinton's
political platform and/or campaign:

12. What title(s) are used to refer to Hillary Clinton (i.e. Mrs, Ms, Secretary, etc.)?

13. Is a comparison made between Hillary Clinton and another Democratic candidate?
          Yes (if yes, please list the name if the other candidate)   No

14. Is Bill Clinton mentioned in the article?
          Yes   No

15. Sources used for direct/paraphrased quotations (include name of source and political
affiliation):

44

16. Overarching main theme(s)/topic(s) of article:

17. Key words or phrases used to express the main theme/topic (highlight in article being coded):

18. Overall language used to portray Hillary Clinton and/or her campaign (circle one):
     Positive   Negative   Neutral

19. Is Hillary Clinton's gender directly mentioned in the article?
     Yes   No

20. If so, in what context is Hillary's gender directly referenced? What language (i.e. words and descriptors) is used? Please list mention of gender exactly as it appears in article (copy and paste).

Appendix C: Coding Guidelines

Coding scheme question (see Appendix B)	Coder tips and guidelines
1. News outlet name	Write full news outlet name
2. Article title:	Record full article title, as is
3. Subhead	Record full article subtitle, as is
4. Publication date (DD/MM/YY)	Date article was published online, typically under the header at the upper left
5. Paragraph count of article	Count the number of paragraphs included in the article; any full paragraph in the text of the article counts, regardless of size (i.e. one sentence); do not count photo captions; do count paragraph breaks for quotes
6. Type of story (circle one if mentioned): Feature News story Opinion Other	The provided four types of stories are not totally inclusive of every type of story that may be listed; only circle one if included in the article header; if one is not included, mark n/a
7. Place article appears on website (i.e. section), if listed in article header: Politics Economics/Economy Culture Tech Markets Health Elections Equality Society U.S.	Similarly, the ten options provided are not totally inclusive of every place an article may appear on each outlet's website; only circle one if it is listed among the options; if the answer is not available, mark n/a

8. Elements in story (circle applicable and provide details):
        a.   Quote from Hillary Clinton (copy quote as is – no other details necessary)
        b.   Photo (describe Hillary Clinton's expression/stance and any other defining characteristics of the photo – such as location and other people/objects included)
	If a direct quote from Hillary Clinton is included, for section a) copy all direct quotes from Hillary Clinton as they appear in the article; no other details are necessary
	
	 If any photos are included with the provided article, for section b) describe Hillary Clinton's expression/stance and any other defining characteristics of the photo - such as location and other people/objects included; stay away from adjectives and subjective descriptors; any details provided in the photo caption may be included; if Hillary Clinton is

	not in the photo, this section may be marked "n/a"
	Correct examples include: "Hillary stands at a podium with her hand in the air in emphasis with a half-smile and concentrating look on her face" "Hillary speaking at an Elementary school; she stands, mouth open in mid-sentence, with one hand raised in the air" "Hillary speaking at a rally with an American flag and blue background" "A headshot of Hillary laughing during a campaign gathering" "Hillary sitting next to Jimmy Kimmel while appearing on his show"
9. If Hillary Clinton is featured in the photo, does the photo portray her in an overall negative, positive or neutral light?	Based on your "objective" description of the photo, decide where in your opinion if the photo portrays Hillary Clinton in a negative, positive or neutral light; think about the author's intention behind including the photo
	Negative Does the shot specifically catch her mid-sentence, making an abnormal face? Does the photo appear to be chosen subjectively by the author of the story?
	Positive Does the photo choice convey anything positive about Clinton's abilities, personal characteristics and/or campaign platform? Are her and any other candidates or parties in the photo portrayed in an equal fashion?
	Neutral This photo does not leave the viewer with any negative or positive feelings about the candidate; inclusion of the photo is objective and does not seem like an attempt to sway the viewer in any way; Hillary Clinton is portrayed in an equal fashion with any other parties in the photo
10. List all descriptors personal	Include any descriptors used in direct

characteristics used to describe or depict Hillary Clinton (i.e. physical appearance, clothing, hair, facial expressions, etc.)	reference to Hillary Clinton's physical appearance, clothing, hair, facial expressions, dress and personality; if the same descriptor is used more than once, or an additional descriptor is used, list each separated by a semicolon; these could be negative, positive and neutral and shouldn't be a full sentence or long quote, but instead one-word adjectives or descriptors Examples of personal descriptors include: "ugly," "young," "charismatic," "leader," "experienced," "likeable" and "untrustworthy"
11. List all descriptors (i.e. adjectives and comparisons) used to portray Hillary Clinton's political platform and/or campaign	Include any descriptors used in direct reference to Hillary Clinton's campaign, political platform, campaign performance or campaign strategy; if the same descriptor is used more than once, or an additional descriptor is used, list each separated by a semicolon; these could be negative, positive and neutral and shouldn't be a full sentence or long quote, but instead one-word adjectives or descriptors Examples of personal descriptors include: "competitive," "transparent," "hawkish," "raucous"
12. What title(s) are used to refer to Hillary Clinton (i.e. Mrs, Ms, Secretary, etc.)?	List all titles - each separated by semicolon - used throughout the entire article to refer to Hillary Clinton; list each title used only once; these could be more "official" seeming titles, like Hillary and Mrs. Clinton, or titles coined by the author, like "The Madonna of Politics"
13. Is a comparison made between Hillary Clinton and another Democratic candidate? Yes (if yes, please list the name if the other candidate) No	If Hillary Clinton is compared with another candidate, list the full name of the other candidate; if she is compared to more than one candidate throughout the entire piece, list each candidate separated by a semicolon; you do not need to list the number of times each comparison is made - only list each candidate once

14. Is Bill Clinton mentioned in the article? Yes No	If Bill Clinton is mentioned, including directly by name or as a reference as Hillary Clinton's husband/a part of her political and personal history, circle yes; if not, circle no
15. Sources used for direct/paraphrased quotations (include name of source and political affiliation)	List the full name, as included in the article, for all sources used for direct/paraphrased quotations; if more than one reference is quoted, list each separated by a semicolon For example: "Cal Thomas" "Sen. Rand Paul; New Jersey Gov. Chris Christie" "Billy Vassiliadis, a veteran Democratic strategist in Nevada; Rep. Joaquin Castro of Texas in Las Vegas"
16. Overarching main theme(s)/topic(s) of article	Summarize the main theme /topic of the article in a sentence or two; you may use your own words but try to be as specific as possible; re-read the introduction and conclusion of the article, if necessary for accuracy
17. Key words or phrases used to express the main theme/topic (highlight in article being coded)	Include 1-3 main phrases or sentences that capture this main theme; if coding on paper, highlight each; if coding on a computer, copy and paste them directly as they appear
18. Overall language used to portray Hillary Clinton and/or her campaign (circle one): Positive Negative Neutral	Circle the dominant overall language used to portray and discuss Hillary Clinton and her campaign; this includes all sources quotes and the author's words **Positive** The dominant language that is used discusses Hillary Clinton in a positive light; no (or very few) negative remarks are made about the candidate **Negative** The language used by the author and the quotes selected depict Hillary Clinton in a negative light; negative poll numbers or the reporting of negative factual data could be

	included
	Neutral The dominant language used in the article, including quotes by sources, does not necessarily add to or take away from the reader's perception of Hillary Clinton; seems objective in overall nature
19. Is Hillary Clinton's gender directly mentioned in the article? Yes No	A direct mention of gender could include any words that denote gender - such as wife, woman, female candidate, etc. - in reference to Hillary Clinton
20. If so, in what context is Hillary's gender directly referenced? What language (i.e. words and descriptors) is used? Please list mention of gender exactly as it appears in article (copy and paste).	If you answered "yes" to question 19, include context of direct gender mention here; context can be determined by looking at why and how her gender was mentioned and used in the article; copy and paste context exactly as it appears

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Figure 1. Overall Main Themes from Articles

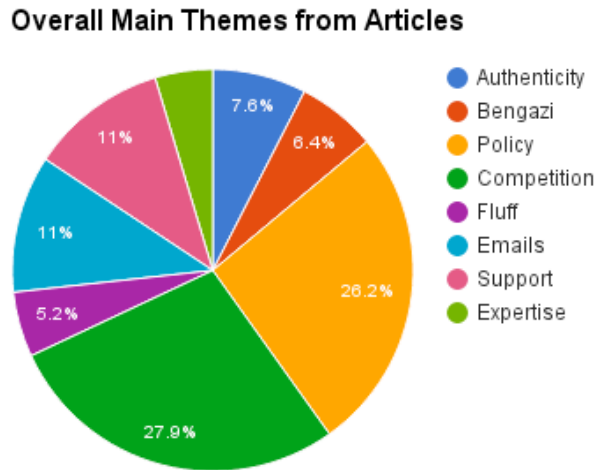**Overall Main Themes from Articles**

Figure 2. Main Themes from *The Wall Street Journal*

Main Themes for The Wall Street Journal
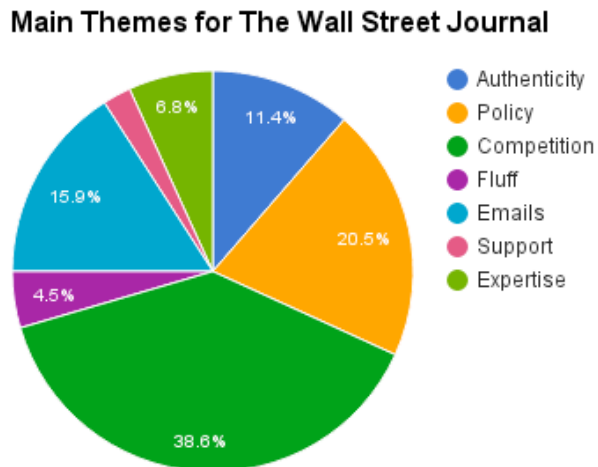
Figure 3. Main Themes from *The Economist*

Main Themes for The Economist

- Bengazi
- Policy
- Competition
- Fluff
- Support
- Expertise

43.5%
26.1%
4.3%
13%
8.7%
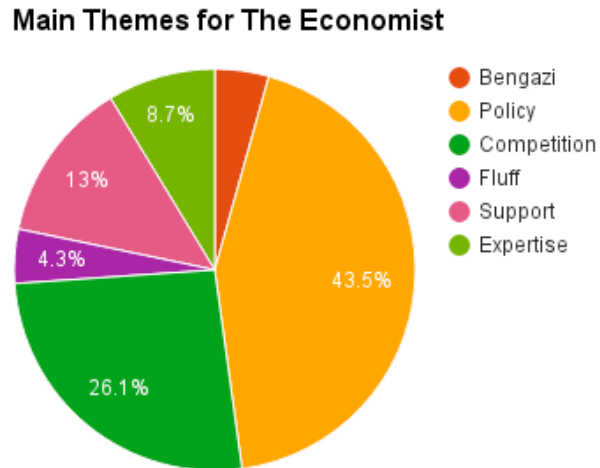
Figure 4. Main Themes from *MSNBC*

Main Themes for MSNBC

- Authenticity
- Bengazi
- Policy
- Competition
- Fluff
- Support
- Expertise

12.5%
37.5%
18.8%
6.3%
18.8%
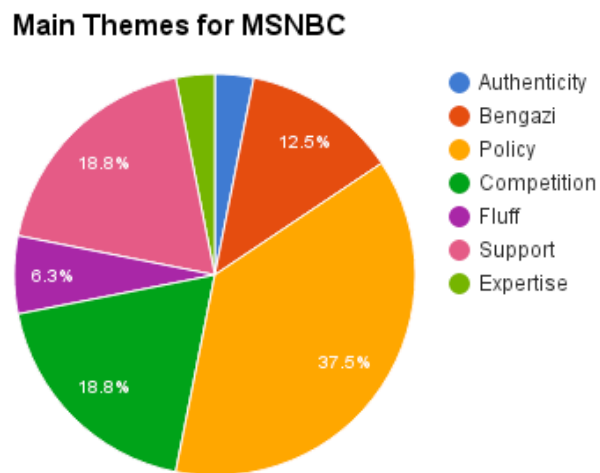
Figure 5. Main Themes from *Fox News*

Main Themes for Fox News

- Authenticity — 9.6%
- Bengazi — 8.2%
- Policy — 19.2%
- Competition — 26%
- Fluff — 5.5%
- Emails — 16.4%
- Support — 12.3%
- Expertise
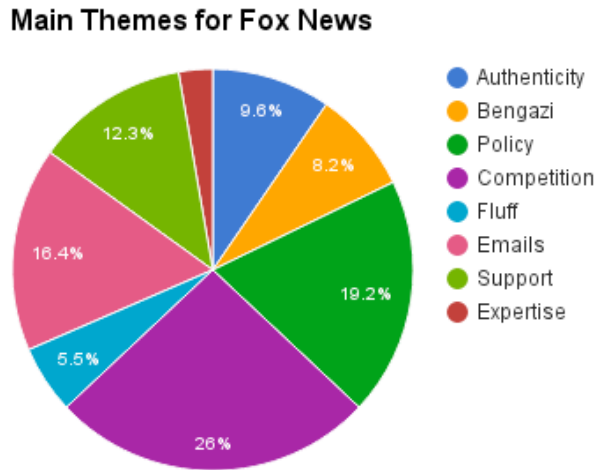
Figure 6. Titles Used by *MSNBC*

Titles Used by MSNBC

- Secretary of State — 12.7%
- Hillary Clinton — 39.2%
- Clinton — 36.7%
- Former first lady
- Democratic frunt runner
- Presidential front runner
- Secretary Clinton
- Hillary
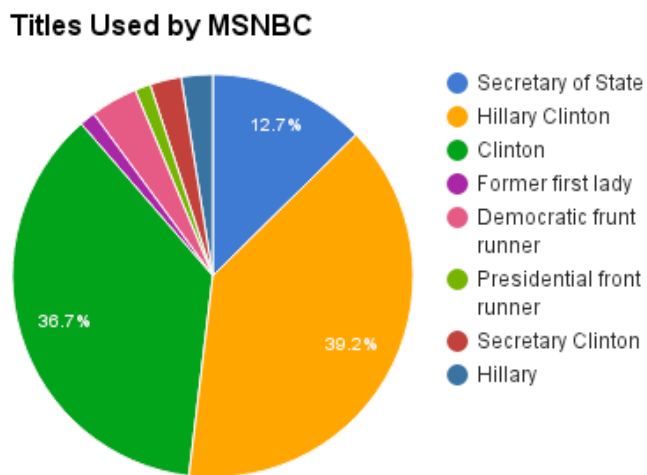
Figure 7. Titles Used by *Fox News*

Titles Used by Fox News

- Secretary of State
- Mrs. Clinton
- Hillary Clinton
- Clinton
- Former first lady
- First lady
- Democratic frunt runner
- Presidential front...
- Secretary Clinton
- Hillary
- Hillary Rodham...

11.4%
9.7%
4%
25%
39.8%
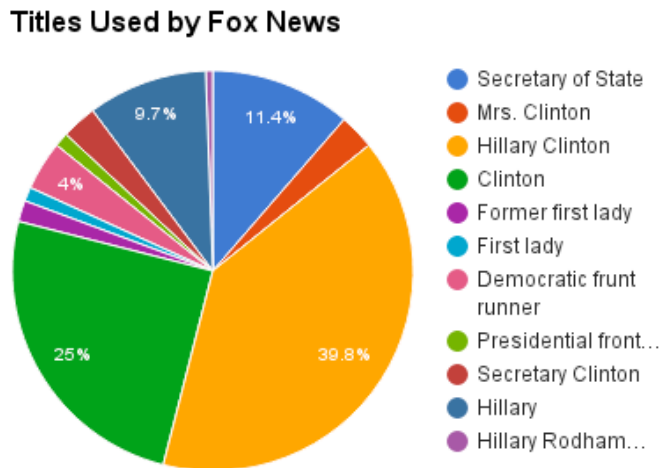
Figure 8. Portrayal of Hillary Clinton in photos from *The Wall Street Journal*
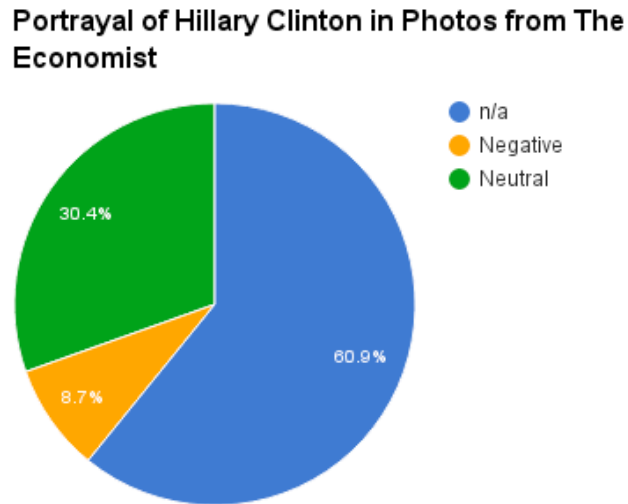

Portrayal of Hillary Clinton in Photos from The Wall Street Journal

- n/a
- Positive
- Negative
- Neutral

20%
4.4%
53.3%
22.2%
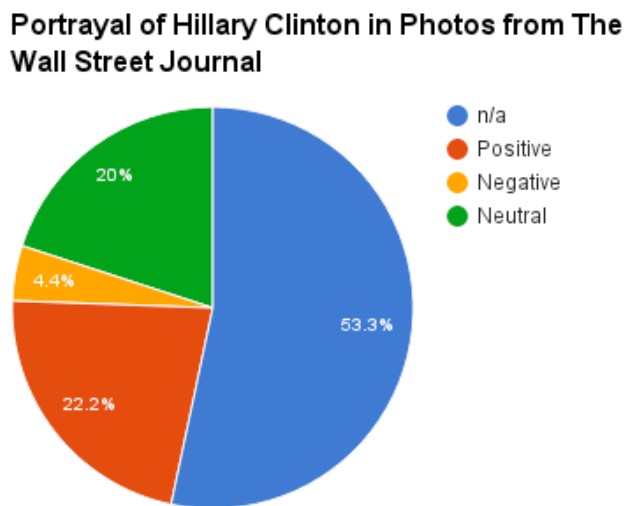
Figure 9. Portrayal of Hillary Clinton in photos from *The Economist*

Portrayal of Hillary Clinton in Photos from The Economist

- n/a
- Negative
- Neutral

30.4%

60.9%

8.7%

Figure 10. Portrayal of Hillary Clinton in photos from *MSNBC*

Portrayal of Hillary Clinton in Photos from MSNBC

- n/a
- Positive
- Neutral

38.7%

54.8%

6.5%

Figure 11. Portrayal of Hillary Clinton in photos from *Fox News*

Figure 12. Overall descriptors used to talk about Hillary Clinton
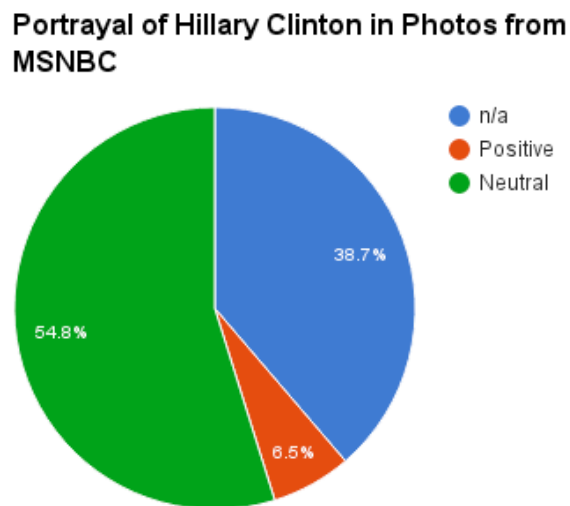
Figure 13. Overall descriptors used in reference to Hillary Clinton's campaign

Figure 14. Instances of comparison of Hillary Clinton with another candidate in all four

outlets
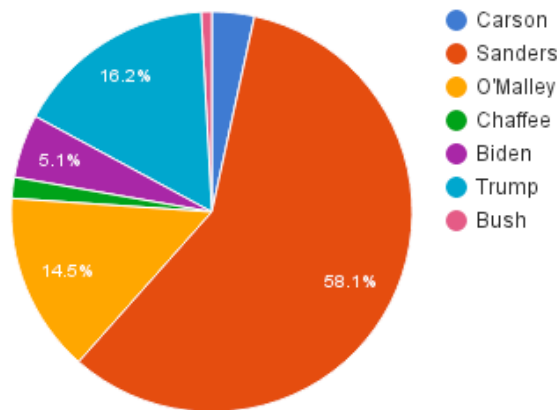
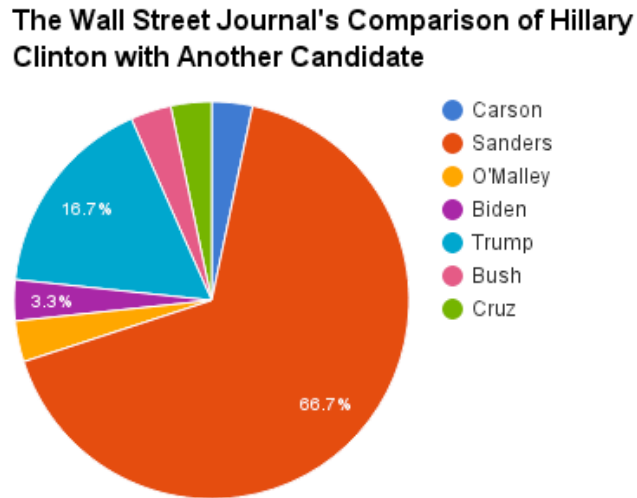Figure 15. *The Wall Street Journal*'s comparison of Hillary Clinton with another

candidate

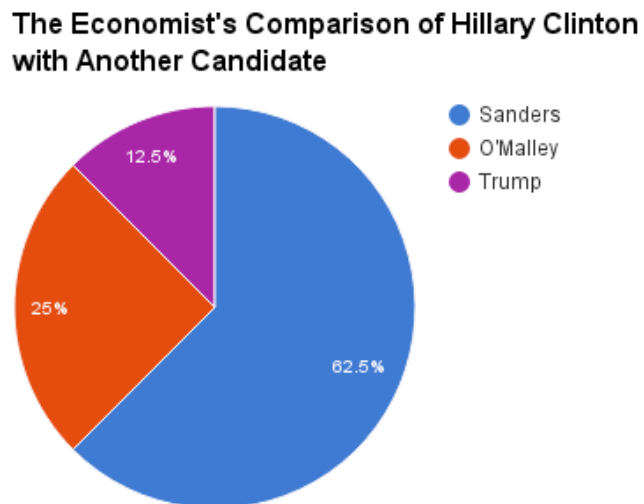Figure 16. *The Economist's* comparison of Hillary Clinton with another
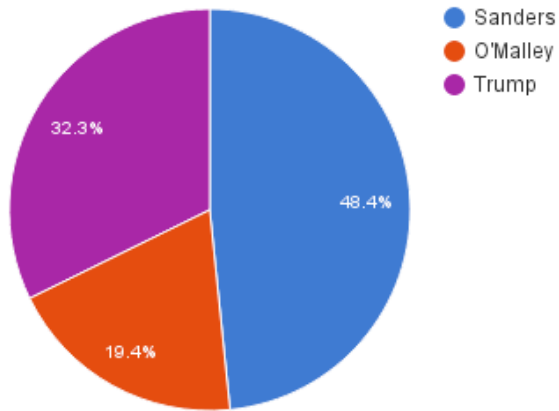
candidate

Figure 17. *MSNBC's* comparison of Hillary Clinton with another

candidate

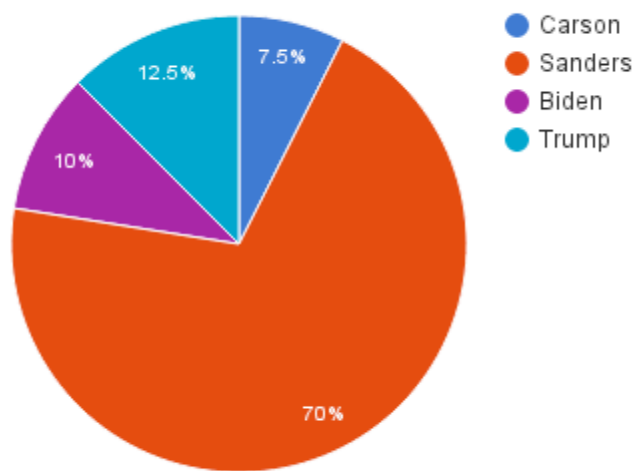Figure 18. *Fox News'* comparison of Hillary Clinton with another

candidate

Figure 19. Overall descriptors used in reference to Hillary Clinton, her personal
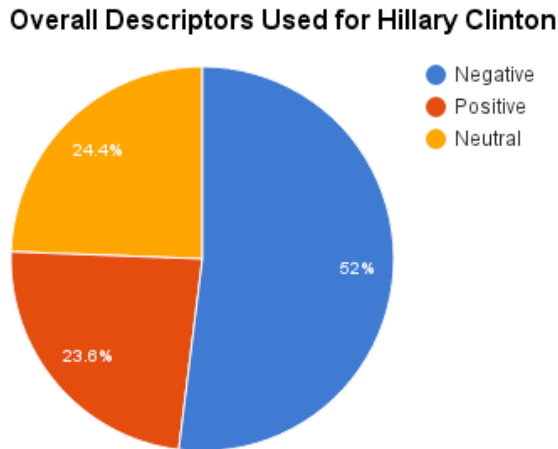
characteristics, policies and campaigns

Overall Descriptors Used for Hillary Clinton

- Negative
- Positive
- Neutral

24.4%

52%

23.6%

Figure 20. Descriptors used by *The Wall Street Journal* in reference to Hillary Clinton,

her personal characteristics, policies and campaigns

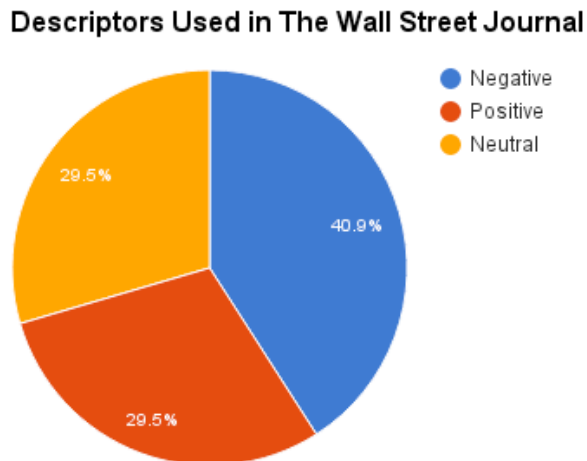**Descriptors Used in The Wall Street Journal**

- Negative
- Positive
- Neutral

29.5%

40.9%

29.5%

Figure 21. Descriptors used by *The Economist i*n reference to Hillary Clinton, her personal characteristics, policies and campaigns

Descriptors Used in The Economist

- Negative
- Positive
- Neutral

50%
31.3%
18.8%
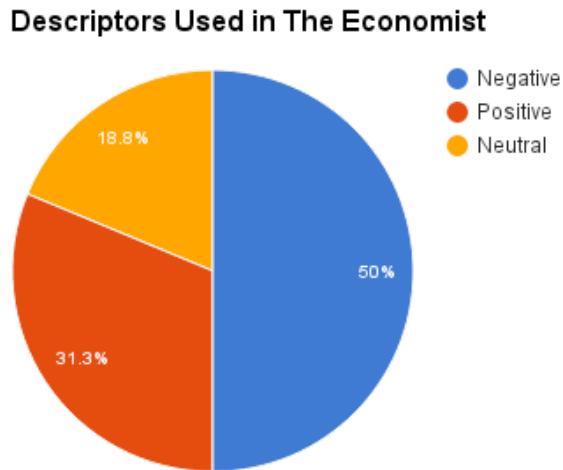
Figure 22. Descriptors used by *MSNBC* in reference to Hillary Clinton, her personal characteristics, policies and campaigns

Descriptors Used in MSNBC

- Negative
- Positive
- Neutral

23.1%
38.5%
38.5%
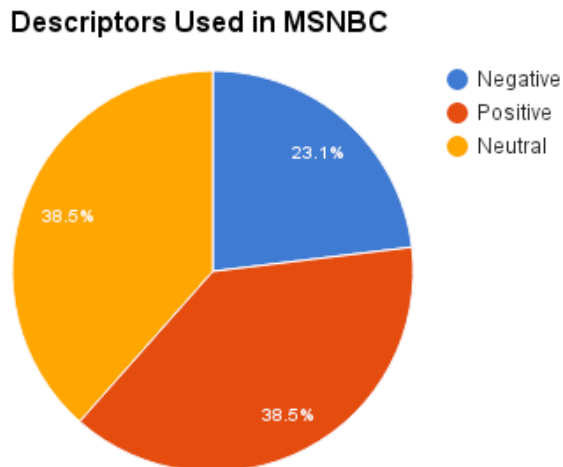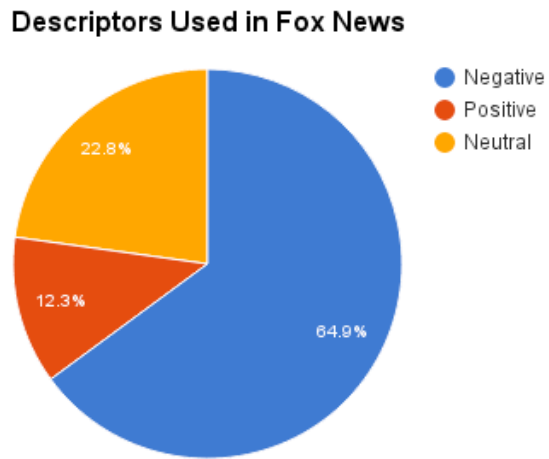
Figure 23. Descriptors used by *Fox News* in reference to Hillary Clinton, her personal

characteristics, policies and campaigns

Descriptors Used in Fox News

TABLES

Table 1. Operational definitions of main emerging themes

Authenticity	Positive and negative remarks directly relating to Clinton's character; questioning her trustworthiness; represents perceived trust of voters
Emails	anything relating to, or in discussion of, the public investigation into Clinton's use of a private server for her email storage while serving as Secretary of State from 2001 to 2009
Support	refers directly to Clinton's negative/positive poll numbers and dwindling/gaining voter preferences
Competition	the discussion of other candidates, come and gone during the 2015 primary races; also includes reviews of the occurrences of debates (both Republican and Democratic), the questions asked during these debates as well as Clinton's and other candidates' performances
policy/politics	any discussion of U.S. or foreign policy – whether it is through Clinton's, Obama's decisions or another candidate's – including foreign policy, gun policy, economic policy, etc.
Benghazi	references to the attack of a U.S. diplomatic outpost on September 11, 2012 in Benghazi, Libya during which four Americans were killed; including the then-Secretary of State Clinton's role during the attacks as well as mentions of the Benghazi committee and ongoing investigations
Fluff	public interest stories, such as Clinton's likes/dislikes, what she wore, etc.
Expertise	a discussion of Clinton's perceived ability to be a successful president; as relating to qualifications and experience

Table 2. All four news outlets use of personal descriptors when talking about Hillary

Clinton

Used by reporter (excluding quotes)	Positive	Negative	Neutral
Overall	17 9.9%	20 11.6%	9 5.2%
The Wall Street Journal	6 13.6%	5 11.4%	1 2.3%
The Economist	5 21.7%	2 8.7%	0 0.0%
MSNBC	3 9.4%	0 0.0%	2 6.3%
Fox News	3 4.1%	13 17.8%	6 8.2%
Used in quotes selected by reporter			
Overall	3 1.7%	12 7.0%	2 1.2%
The Wall Street Journal	2 4.5%	3 6.8	1 2.3%
The Economist	0 0.0%	0 0.0%	0 0.0%
MSNBC	2 6.5%	0 0.0%	17 54.8%
Fox News	0 0.0%	2 6.3%	0 0.0%

Table 3. All four news outlets use of descriptors when talking about Hillary Clinton's campaign

Used by reporter (excluding quotes)	Positive	Negative	Neutral
Overall	10 5.8%	30 17.4%	20 11.6%
The Wall Street Journal	5 11.4%	7 15.9%	10 22.7%
The Economist	0 0.0%	6 26.1%	1 4.3%
MSNBC	2 6.3%	1 3.1%	3 9.4%
Fox News	3 4.1%	16 21.9%	6 8.2%
Used in quotes selected by reporter			
Overall	0 0.0%	4 2.3%	0 0.0%
The Wall Street Journal	0 0.0%	3 6.8%	1 2.3%
The Economist	0 0.0%	0 0.0%	0 0.0%
MSNBC	0 0.0%	0 0.0%	0 0.0%
Fox News	0 0.0%	1 1.4%	0 0.0%

Table 4. Article mentions of Bill Clinton, by outlet

Outlet	Yes	No
The Wall Street Journal	15 34.1%	29 65.9%
The Economist	2 8.7%	21 91.3%
MSNBC	5 15.6%	27 84.4%
Fox News	15 20.6%	58 79.5%

Table 5. Direct references to Hillary Clinton's gender, by outlet

Overall references	No 157 91.3%		Yes 15 8.7%	
Outlet	No reference	Negative	Neutral	Positive
The Wall Street Journal	40 90.9%	0 0.0%	3 6.8%	1 2.3%
The Economist	21 91.3%	0 0.0%	0 0.0%	2 8.7%
MSNBC	30 93.8%	0 0.0%	1 3.1%	1 3.1%
Fox News	66 90.4%	3 4.1%	3 4.1%	1 1.4%